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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 001328

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, S/SRAP, P/M, DRL
NSC FOR MCFAUL
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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN PRAISES BILATERL RELATIONSHIP, SAYS "LOGISTICS
BASE" FOR AFGHANISTAN FULLY OPEN FOR DISCUSSION

REF: (A) ASTANA 1250
(B) ASTANA 0557

Classified by Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland: Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev opened an August 3 meeting with the Ambassador with an unusually long introduction with the media present in which he stressed that U.S.-Kazakhstan relations are a top priority for President Nazarbayev and detailed the full spectrum of bilateral cooperation. Saudabayev asked for more specifics on the global nuclear energy summit to be held in the United States in 2010, and said Nazarbayev would like to combine his participation in the event with a bilateral visit. Asked by the Ambassador for specifics about Kazakhstan's so-far general offer to provide us with a "logistics base" for supplying Afghanistan, Saudabayev said that the United States should make its own proposal based on its needs, and the Kazakhstanis will review it, after which the experts on both sides can work out details. Significantly, he listed no restrictions, and seemed to imply a provisional blank check. Saudabayev said he was pleased with the Ambassador's recent interview in the newspaper "Vremya," in which the Ambassador spoke about media freedom and criticized the new Internet Law. Saudabayev said the interview had "a positive influence." END SUMMARY.

LENGTHY INTRODUCTION FOR THE MASS MEDIA

¶2. (U) President Nazarbayev's life-long friend and confidante, State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev, opened an August 3 meeting with the Ambassador by stressing -- in front of television and print journalists -- that the U.S.-Kazakhstan relationship is one of President Nazarbayev's top priorities. He expressed strong appreciation for the commitment of the Obama Administration to further enhance bilateral relations. Saudabayev said that top bilateral priorities include security issues like Afghanistan, non-proliferation, and economic cooperation. U.S.-Kazakhstan economic ties, he noted, go well beyond the energy sector, with General Electric recently having opened a billion-dollar locomotive assembly plant in Astana -- Kazakhstan's largest non-energy investment to date. Pointing out that he heads the commission overseeing the Bolashak program -- which provides government funding for several thousand Kazakhstanis to study abroad each year -- Saudabayev underlined that many of these students study in the United States, helping to strengthen people-to-people ties.

13. (U) Saudabayev stressed the importance of stabilizing Afghanistan, maintaining that the current situation poses a security threat to Kazakhstan's southern border. Kazakhstan is both a transit and destination country for Afghanistan's narcotics, he noted. He said that Kazakhstan is continuing to work on humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan -- including a program to provide free university education in Kazakhstan to up to 1,000 Afghan students -- and is facilitating the transit of supplies for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

14. (U) Saudabayev said that President Obama's non-proliferation proposals are strongly supported by Kazakhstan -- including in public statements by President Nazarbayev -- and have opened up new possibilities for bilateral non-proliferation cooperation. Saudabayev summed up his 15-minute opening statement -- with journalists still present -- by saying that "I think everything is going very well in all areas of our partnership." The Ambassador concurred, and noted there are an increasing number of high-level visits, which includes upcoming visits by CODEL Boehner and CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus.

15. (C) COMMENT: Although the Ambassador's high-level meetings usually get camera-spray coverage at the top, such a long introduction with journalists present is unusual. It appears the Kazakhstanis deliberately staged this to signal to the domestic audience -- and probably to other major powers as well -- their commitment to enhancing our bilateral relationship as Nazarbayev continues "to recalibrate" his big-power relationships. We believe it was also a clear signal of respect for the Obama Administration. This kind of public signal should not be underestimated. END COMMENT.

EXPLICIT REQUEST FOR A NAZARBAYEV VISIT TO WASHINGTON

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16. (C) With the journalists finally dismissed, Saudabayev asked the Ambassador if he had any further details about the global nuclear security summit to be held in the United States early in 2010 to which Vice President Biden had invited Nazarbayev during their April 23 telephone call. Saudabayev explained that the Kazakhstanis believe this will be a landmark event for the global non-proliferation regime. They would like to combine President Nazarbayev's participation in the event with a stand-alone bilateral Nazarbayev visit with President Obama and, more broadly, in Washington. (NOTE: Nazarbayev's last White House visit was September 2006. END NOTE.) An Obama-Nazarbayev meeting, Saudabayev suggested, would open a new chapter in bilateral relations. The earlier both sides start preparing the groundwork for a bilateral visit, the better, he explained, even suggesting we should start working on position papers for deliverables. Without trying to dampen Saudabayev's enthusiasms, the Ambassador said cautiously that he did not have specific details about the summit, but would request them from Washington. He also promised to relay the proposal for a bilateral visit to Washington and said he would recommend that it be accepted.

17. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Embassy Astana requests whatever details might be available at this early date on the nuclear security summit. We also request guidance on how we might provisionally respond to Nazarbayev's request for a separate bilateral visit to Washington.

BILATERAL COMMISSION

18. (C) The Ambassador said he expected to be able to present a formal U.S. proposal for a U.S.-Kazakhstan bilateral commission in the near future, and expressed hope that its work would commence in the coming months. Saudabayev suggested that the commission be formally rolled out during a Nazarbayev visit to Washington, since the two presidents, he intemperately assumed, would be co-chairs. The Ambassador replied we would work together on all details to make the commission a real success with concrete achievements.

AFGHANISTAN: "TELL US WHAT YOU NEED FOR A LOGISTICS BASE"

19. (C) On Afghanistan, Saudabayev said that Kazakhstan would like the United States to purchase some supplies for U.S. troops, such as fuel

and wheat for Afghanistan, from Kazakhstan. (NOTE: Kazakhstan is the world's sixth-largest wheat exporter. END NOTE.) Procuring supplies from Kazakhstan would be cheaper and more reliable than procuring them from more distant countries, he maintained. He noted that there have been bilateral discussions about temporary storage facilities, including near the Caspian, for goods transiting Kazakhstan through the Northern Distribution Network. This issue came up during Deputy Security Council Secretary Nurlan Abdirov's July 14 visit to TRANSCOM when Kazakhstan's defense attache in the United States intervened to say that President Nazarbayev wants to offer the United States a "logistics base" for Afghanistan. Saudabayev said that now is the time to "put some specifics" into the discussion.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador noted that during their March 30 meeting, President Nazarbayev had told him in passing that he is ready to offer the United States a "logistics base" for Afghanistan. General Petraeus told the Ambassador on July 27 during the CENTCOM Chiefs of Mission conference in Bahrain that he would like more details about this idea. The Ambassador asked Saudabayev, "What specifically is your president offering -- something as modest as a container storage yard, or something much more comprehensive?" Saudabayev replied simply that there is top-level political will in Kazakhstan to provide greater assistance on Afghanistan. The U.S. side should make a proposal about a "logistics base" based on its needs. General Petraeus can put forward his detailed vision during his visit to Astana on August 13. The Kazakhstanis will review it, and, if acceptable, the experts can work out the details.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: We want to caution against "irrational exuberance" of expectations, but this does seem to be nearly a provisional blank check. We are aware that General Petraeus, during his mid-August visit to Central Asia, might explore back-up possibilities for the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan does not seem, at

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this point, to want to limit the possibilities, and does seem to be open to any kind of details General Petraeus might be interested to propose. We should not limit our options until we test them. END COMMENT.

REGIONAL RELATIONS

¶12. (C) Saudabayev asked for feedback on Under Secretary Burns's visit to Kazakhstan and readouts on his meetings with other Central Asian leaders. The Ambassador explained that the Burns delegation was well pleased with its meeting with President Nazarbayev, and also had had variously productive meetings with Presidents Berdimukhamedov, Bakiyev, and Karimov. Although he was guarded in his criticism, Saudabayev made clear Kazakhstan has difficulty understanding some of Uzbekistani President Karimov's positions. He mused that at independence in 1991, Uzbekistan most definitely had a leg up in the region, but hadn't taken advantage of its possibilities.

¶13. (C) Commenting on the fact that the United States had managed to stay at Kyrgyzstan's Manas Air Base, however it is redefined for public purposes, Saudabayev argued that "this wasn't about big politics, just about money, and whoever paid the most for the base was going to win." He noted that Nazarbayev had attended Bakiyev's inauguration in Bishkek the previous day (August 2), delivering remarks in support of Bakiyev. The day before that (August 1), Nazarbayev had attended a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit in Bishkek which coincided with Bakiyev's birthday. "It's been a good birthday for Bakiyev," Saudabayev joked. He added that Uzbekistan's President Karimov was not pleased with Kyrgyzstan's decision to provide a base for the CSTO's rapid reaction force in Osh.

NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW, NON-PROLIFERATION COMMISSION

¶14. (C) Saudabayev said that he had read the Ambassador's recent interview with the newspaper "Vremya," and was pleased with the Ambassador's remarks, which "had a positive influence." (COMMENT: In the interview, the Ambassador noted that both the United States and Kazakhstan have a desire for a stronger bilateral relationship,

and are beginning to act on that, including by establishing a bilateral commission. In the interview, the Ambassador also clearly expressed concerns about recent libel cases against Kazakhstani journalists and media outlets, and said the United States regretted that Kazakhstan had recently passed restrictive Internet legislation. END COMMENT.) Saudabayev added that in response to President Obama's new non-proliferation initiatives, the Kazakhstani government is considering establishing a non-proliferation commission under President Nazarbayev which would help advance issues in this area.

HOAGLAND